U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Alpena FRO Accomplishment Report

Aquatic Species Conservation and Management

Alpena FRO Conducts Lake Whitefish Netting

From June 3 to June 16 staff from the Alpena Fisheries Resource Office (FRO) conducted experimental gill net sets as part of the fishery independent lake whitefish survey in 1836 Treaty waters of northern Lake Huron. Staff involved included Treaty Unit Coordinator Aaron Woldt, Biologist Adam Kowalski, Biologist Scott Koproski, Assistant Project Leader Tracy Hill, and Project Leader Jerry McClain. Three types of gear were set: bottom-set, variable mesh 6' deep survey nets, thermocline oriented 12' deep nets, and variable mesh survey nets legged 3' off the bottom. The purpose of these sets was three-fold: 1) to document early June lake whitefish and lake trout gillnet catch rates to compare with historic and July/August 2004 survey data; 2) to test the utility and effectiveness of thermocline oriented nets in catching lake whitefish; and 3) to determine if nets legged 3' off the bottom catch less lake trout and more lake whitefish than conventional bottom set survey nets.

The Alpena FRO has been conducting a fishery independent lake whitefish survey in 1836 Treaty waters of Lake Huron since 2002. In 2002, the Modeling Subcommittee (MSC) of the Technical Fisheries Committee identified fishery independent lake whitefish data as a critical information need. The MSC annually collects data and conducts model runs to determine lake whitefish harvest regulation guidelines for 5 management units in northern Lake Huron under the Year 2000 Consent Decree.

In 2003 the Alpena FRO began paired setting of legged nets with bottom set nets to determine if legged nets reduced lake trout bycatch in the survey. The legged nets provide a 3' gap near the substrate that allowed the strongly bottom oriented lake trout to pass under the net. Limited 2003 results showed that legged nets reduced lake trout catch rates without significantly reducing lake whitefish catch rates. However, lake whitefish catch rates were low in both gears. In 2004 we intend to fish more legged nets to expand our data set. In 2004 we also began setting thermocline oriented nets to evaluate if lake whitefish are foraging in or near the thermocline more due to lack of diporeia on the lake bottom.

In 2002 and 2003 we conducted the fishery independent lake whitefish survey in mid-May to mid-June. At the spring 2004 MSC meeting, researchers agreed to move the survey to mid-July to mid-August to see if lake whitefish catch rates would be higher at this time. We conducted sets at a limited number of our 2004 survey sites in June so that we could make temporal comparisons between June and July/August catch rates.

This survey will continue annually and will be tailored to meet the needs identified by the MSC. All data from this survey will be compiled, maintained, and analyzed at the Alpena FRO.

Data collected in this survey will improve the accuracy of current population models being used to set lake whitefish harvest guidelines in 1836 Treaty waters of northern Lake Huron. Good model output is essential to sound and sustainable management of the lake whitefish resource in northern Lake Huron, and lake whitefish is the central component to the Native American commercial fisheries in 1836 Treaty waters. Harvest limits allow lake whitefish fisheries to be executed while still protecting the biological integrity of lake whitefish stocks. This outcome is consistent with the Service's goal of maintaining self-sustaining populations of native fish species while meeting the needs of tribal communities.

Aaron Woldt

Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management

Fish Passage Restoration on the Jordan River

On June 22, Biologist Wells and SCEP Student Andrea Gray participated in a construction meeting for a road stream crossing on the Jordan River in northern Lower Michigan. The site is located approximately 3 river miles downstream of the Jordan River National Fish Hatchery. The project was partially funded with the Service's FY 2003 Fish Passage Program funds. Additional funding partners included the Conservation Reserve Alliance (CRA), and Trout Unlimited. Completion of this project will involve replacing an undersized culvert with a bottomless culvert. Antrim County Road Commission, CRA, Michigan Department of Natural Resources' Natural Rivers Office, and the Service attended the meeting. Issues discussed included when construction will begin, along with the logistics for the dewatering process and how to control the sediment during construction. The Antrim County Road Commission will submit all necessary permits to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), and prepare all final engineering drawings before construction. The project is slated to begin in late August. Once completed, the project will improve access to approximately 5 river miles of brook trout habitat. This is an example of collaboration between federal, state and local governments to enhance aquatic habitat, and foster positive working relationships for the benefit of fish and wildlife resources. This project is a priority for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and local non profit organizations such as Trout Unlimited. The Jordan River watershed has been identified as a valuable system for native trout species and is listed as a State Natural River.

Susan Wells

Public Use

Fifth Annual LaFarge Riverfest

Project Leader McClain and Biologist Wells participated in the 5th Annual LaFarge Riverfest on June 19 and 20. The festival is an annual family event held in the city of Alpena. The Alpena FRO collected samples of native (smallmouth bass, walleye and northern pike) and invasive fish species (round goby, ruffe and zebra mussels) from the Thunder Bay River for display at the festival. Personnel from the USGS Hammond Bay Biological Station provided sea lamprey for the display. Riverfest participants received information about Lake Huron fisheries and fisheries management by visiting the booth. Approximately 2,000 people visited the booth. This citywide festival allowed the Alpena FRO the opportunity to fulfill one of the station goals of distributing information to the general public about fish and wildlife resources, natural ecosystems and programs of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Susan Wells

Alpena FRO Delivers a Presentation to the Exchange Club

On June 22, Fishery Biologist Scott Koproski delivered a presentation to the Exchange Club-Alpena Chapter. Members of the Exchange Club were interested in learning more about the Service, its roles and responsibilities, and some specific projects worked on by Alpena FRO staff. Biologist Koproski presented some general information about the Fish and Wildlife Service and its projects in the Great Lakes. Discussion items included sea lamprey control, lake trout stocking and restoration, the Partners Program, aquatic nuisance species control, lake sturgeon activities, native species work, National Wildlife Refuges, and implementation of the Year 2000 Consent Decree. Exchange Club members asked many questions about Alpena FRO projects and obtained a better understanding of Service responsibilities. Approximately 30 Exchange Club members attended the presentation. Biologist Koproski's presentation educated Exchange Club members regarding Alpena FRO and Service activities in Region 3. This outcome is consistent with the Service's goal of implementing educational and outreach activities to educate public regarding Service activities.

Scott Koproski

Back Door Aquatic Exotics Topic for Association of Lifelong Learners Presentation

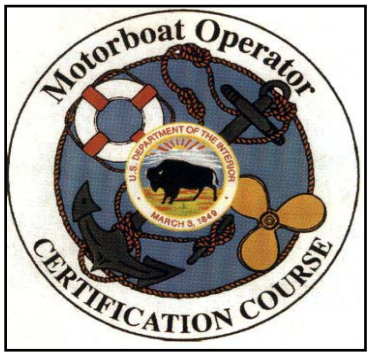
"Back Door" Aquatic Exotics was the topic of a recent Alpena FRO PowerPoint presentation to the Alpena, Michigan Association of Lifelong Learners held June 24 at Alpena Community College. The presentation focused on aquatic exotic species that are found within the Alpena area in the Thunder Bay River and Lake Huron - aquatic exotics that are found "outside our back door". Biologist Anjanette Bowen provided the presentation to educate life long learners

about the invaders found within our area, the problems they cause, and what can be done to curb their spread. Hands-on materials were provided including live sea lamprey from the USGS Hammond Bay Biological Station and plastomounts of round goby, zebra mussels, and Eurasian ruffe. Printed handouts were also available on aquatic exotic species. The presentation was well received with much interest and many questions. Public education about Service efforts to address threats to aquatic species and habitats for effective conservation and management is an important component of the Fisheries Strategic Vision.

Anjanette Bowen

Workforce Management

Sturgeon Bay Open Water Course



Motorboat Operator Certification Course (MOCC) Open Water Module (OWM) instructors Adam Kowalski and Aaron Woldt (Alpena FRO), lead instructor Stewart Cogswell (Green Bay FRO), John Decker (LE Special Agent), and Tim Peiffer and Kyle Krysiak (Marquette Biological Station) put on a four day MOCC with OWM course in Sturgeon Bay, WI from June 22 to 25, 2004. The Open Water Module was established in Region 3 in 2002 and is designed to give training to DOI employees who operate and/or work on vessels in open water. The open water module was created because the basic MOCC course did not meet the training needs of employees who work on large, open bodies of water.

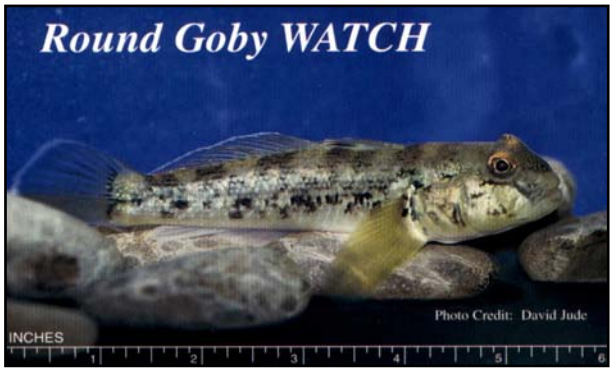
The following is a list topics covered during the course: navigating using only a chart and charting tools, operating a global positioning system (GPS) unit, using a marine radio correctly, surviving in the water, using floatation devices correctly, anchoring correctly, required and recommended equipment for open water vessels, how to obtain current weather conditions before boating, changing a propeller while the vessel is still in the water, how to right a capsized vessel, and a demonstration of a Coast Guard helicopter performing rescue operations. The basic MOCC course does not cover many of the above topics. Instructors also gave students practical exercises in boat handling, charting, navigating, and GPS and radio operation.

Overall this course was a success, and all 9 students successfully completed the training. Students reported that they learned a great deal and felt that this course should be taken by everyone operating on open water. Open water and MOCC training are valuable curricula designed to make Service personnel competent and safe boaters. Teaching MOCC courses is consistent with the Service's goal to maintain and support an adequately-sized, strategically positioned workforce with state-of-art training, equipment, and technologies in their career fields.

Adam Kowalski

Partnerships and Accountability

Invasive Education on Lake Huron during Michigan's Aquatic Invasive Species Awareness Week (June 7-13)



The Great Lakes harbor a number of aquatic invasive species (AIS). In an effort to raise public awareness about aquatic invasive species, Michigan Governor Granholm declared June 7-13, 2004 "AIS Awareness Week" in Michigan. This year is the second year the Governor has proclaimed a week for AIS Awareness. Biologist Bowen (USFWS in Alpena, Michigan) was interviewed by Gillian Harvey of Alpena's UGN (Upper Great Lakes Network) TV station on June 8 about AIS Awareness Week and efforts conducted to combat the spread of invasives.

Bowen also provided educational materials and outreach on AIS to a number of bait and tackle dealers and marinas along the Lake Huron coast and the St. Marys River from Sault Ste. Marie to Bay City, Michigan. The information is then passed along to anglers, boaters, and water users. Efforts were targeted at educating the public about the harmful effects of invasives, how to recognize them, and what should be done if they locate an invasive. Eurasian ruffe, round goby, sea lamprey, Asian carp, purple loosestrife, Eurasian watermilfoil, and the zebra mussel were some of the invasive species highlighted. Cooperation with bait and tackle dealers is the key to getting the word out to the public who frequent their shops for fishing and boating needs.

Biologist Wells developed an AIS display for visitors to the Alpena Federal Building - showing images of invasives, noting their harmful effects, and their ranges within the Great Lakes. Information was also provided on what the Alpena FRO is doing to combat invasives in Lake Huron and the St. Marys River, and what the public can do to help prevent their spread. Governor Granholm viewed the display on June 7 during her visit to the Alpena Federal Building to meet with NOAA.

Partnerships and efforts to address threats to aquatic species for effective conservation and management are important components of the Fisheries Strategic Vision. Media contact was made to broadcast information about invasive species and materials were provided to over 44 partners to educate over 13,000 water users about aquatic invasive species on Lake Huron and the St. Marys River during Michigan's AIS Awareness Week.

Anjanette Bowen

Accomplishment Archive